



***State of the City Address
Mayor Bob Foster
City of Long Beach
January 9, 2007***

Thank you for the kind words, Matt.
Thank you also, Byron Schwieger.

Thank you, Elder Pearson for the blessing.

Good afternoon.

Welcome to our
City Attorney Bob Shannon;
City Prosecutor Tom Reeves;
City Auditor Laura Doud;

Welcome to the City Manager and the Management Team;
All our City Department Heads;

Chief Batts, Chief Ellis and the Command staffs of our Police and Fire Departments;

Members of our City Boards and Commissions;

Thank you for coming.

Thank you to the Board of Directors and staff at the Chamber of Commerce, and everyone at the Long Beach Convention Center.

Congratulations to Leadership Long Beach, Academic Uprise and the Long Beach Non-Profit Partnership.

I am pleased that this, my first State of the City, will be helpful to your efforts to make our community better.

Your organizations, and so many others throughout our City, toil daily to make our community stronger.

Most of you give many hours of service without acclaim, reminding me of Cato's maxim: "I would rather do right without reward than wrong without punishment." I thank you for all that you do.

A very special thank you to the members of the City Council:

To Vice Mayor Lowenthal,

To Suja Lowenthal,

To Gary DeLong,

To Patrick O'Donnell

To Gerrie Schipske,

To Tonia Reyes Uranga

To Rae Gabelich

To Val Lerch,

To my staff thank you for your dedication to this city and for your tireless efforts on its behalf. I know you are all happy this speech is finally being delivered.

To my mother, thank you for being here and for all the guidance, support, and teaching you and Dad provided.

To my wife, Nancy. Thank you for all of your energies to make this a great City, and your concern for the less fortunate who live in it. You are an exceptional First Lady.

My first few months as Mayor have reinforced my belief that baseball provides the wisdom needed in life.

I turned 60 on January 1st.

And Mickey Mantle was right when he said, "If I knew I was going to live this long I would have taken better care of myself."

Being Mayor has also proved to me that Casey Stengel was correct when he said that leadership was the art of keeping the 50% of the people who hate you away from the undecided.

It is my distinct honor to present you with the State of our City.

For many who have watched Long Beach from afar, our City has always been seen as a city of great possibility;

Grounded in a proud working class heritage and infused by new century industry.

Home to outstanding academic institutions and world-class medical facilities nested at the crossroads of commerce.

We're a destination location on the Southern California coast;

Vibrant and diverse.

A City whose residents can put aside their immediate self-interest to better the whole.

50 square miles of neighborhoods, sewn together into a fabric of our middle class roots;
And bound by a common purpose to provide opportunity to improve our lives.

My friends, in 2006 I believe Long Beach began to realize so much of its promise.

Unburdened by the fiscal deficits of the past;

Inspired by our ethnic, racial and economic diversity.

Filled with compassion and abundant opportunity.

Recognizing that our ascension to exceptional is dependent on what we achieve as a whole, not just in some of our parts.

2006 was a remarkable year.

Remember back to last spring, when two of our neighborhoods groups --- A Better Balance for Long Beach and Coolidge Triangle -- went off to compete in Kansas City, Missouri.

And came back home to Long Beach recognized as two of the Best Neighborhoods in the Nation.

And remember back to just last week, when we learned that Long Beach Police Officers Abe Yap and Roy Wade, Jr. were out of ICU and taking their first steps towards going home.

2006 was the year we again began to invest in programs and projects that demonstrate our shared beliefs as a City:

We invested in our libraries, restoring funding for every branch across the City to 2003 levels;

We invested in two new fire stations, with the support of the Redevelopment Agency Board and the sound financial footing of the Downtown and North Redevelopment Project Areas.

We directed nearly \$18 million dollars in the FY 07 budget to jumpstart the repairs to our City's crumbling streets and sidewalks;

And more help is on the way:

In addition to on-going commitments by the City and the Redevelopment Agency, the passage of California's infrastructure bond package last November means that the City of Long Beach will get an additional \$15 million over the next three years.

Under direction from Councilman DeLong and the City Council, the Department of Public Works is set to unveil an aggressive multi-year financial infrastructure plan to upgrade streets and sidewalks City-wide over the next 10 years.

2006 saw Long Beach continue to solidify our place as a destination for conventions and elite sporting events.

As you saw earlier in today's program, next month Long Beach will be the host City for the finish of the Amgen Tour of California – America's largest and most important cycling event.

16 of the teams in competition were in the Tour de France – *these guys are good*.

Our Convention Center has seen bookings consistently rise – and the folks at the Convention and Visitors Bureau are quick to point out that means we're stealing conventions from other cities.

We've made tremendous strides to improve city government's accountability and transparency of operations.

Thanks to Councilmember Gerrie Schipske, we now have a public records retention policy that will promote continuity despite a change-over in elected office holders.

The Council continued review of the City Charter.

After more than four years of discussion, review by a citizens' commission in 2004 and exhaustive – and sometimes exhausting - hearings over the past year, a series of practical and thoughtful reforms are now before the Council to consider for inclusion on a city-wide ballot.

And Vice Mayor Lowenthal, we will finally get those ethics and lobbying rules you have championed for so long.

We've taken important steps to dramatically improve our environment and air quality.

Under the leadership of Councilman O'Donnell, our Planning Department is instituting a city-wide green building program;

Director Pat West and his entire Community Development team have been hard at work tearing down walls all over the City;

And no one was happier than Councilmember Tonia Reyes-Uranga when the Green Monster came down between Admiral Kidd Park and Cabrillo High School, transforming blighted industrial and adding park space.

In 2006, the Council approved the 56-acre Sports Park project;

And we opened three new parks adding 25 acres of green space in some of our city's most densely populated areas.

More recently, the City purchased 23 additional acres along the LA River as part of the Chavez-Drake greenbelt.

You've been busy, Phil.

No wonder our Parks and Recreation Department was awarded the 2006 National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Parks and Recreation.

Congratulations to Director Phil Hester, our city staff and our Parks & Recreation Commissioners.

And in recent months, Councilman DeLong and I have begun discussions with stakeholders to acquire all 177 acres of the Los Cerritos Wetlands property.

But perhaps the most important step for the environment in Long Beach – and all of Southern California – took place in the Long Beach City Council Chambers, when the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles approved the Clean Air Action Plan.

The Port of Long Beach continues to be a leader in the world of commerce and the Clean Air Action Plan puts them at the forefront of environmental stewardship.

Our work here is far from done, however, because as we all know, our region also leads in a far less distinguished category: that of the nation's dirtiest air.

Combating the problem of pollution created at the Port will continue to be one of my top priorities.

And I will use every resource at my disposal to make sure that we see environmental enhancements moving forward in lock step with any infrastructure improvements that increase cargo capacity and cargo velocity.

Because as I've said many times before, no longer will our kids contract asthma at record rates so that people in Kansas can buy cheaper TV's.

We have made huge strides in bringing the promise of economic development into our neighborhoods.

The capstone project for Downtown redevelopment, the 55 acres at the Queen Mary site, will soon provide Long Beach with one of the most significant economic development opportunities to ever come before our city.

All of Downtown will continue to flourish, fostered by Councilwoman Suja Lowenthal's Downtown Visioning efforts.

In North Long Beach, Councilman Val Lerch, steadfast in his determination to bring development into the 9th District, is close to seeing the first significant retail project there in some time: a 120,000 square foot Target store, along with the revitalization of the North Atlantic corridor and the proposed North Village.

In the 8th District, a property left vacant for over 10 years is on track to become a major retail store – in large part because of the efforts of Councilwoman Rae Gabelich.

And no discussion on development would be complete without mentioning that our Planning and Building Department has instituted a one-stop, streamlined permitting process for residential and commercial developments.

But there is still so much left to do.

Parts of the Westside and North Long Beach still don't have full service grocery stores or pharmacies.

And while retail has its place in our economic development plan, we simply cannot rely on it as the only means to grow our tax base or as the sole outlet for job creation.

We must focus anew on job creation and make every effort, utilize every resource, and call in every favor in Sacramento and Washington, to bring back the solid, middle class jobs our City is founded on.

We must aggressively pursue opportunity when it comes, like the proposed annexation of the Rancho Dominguez industrial property and the possibility of a landing the production line of the next generation Boeing refueling tanker.

It will not be good enough to wait for those chances to come to us; this City must go out and create them through an aggressive economic development program that is multidisciplinary in its approach and proactive in implementation.

And it is imperative that we succeed in our task of increasing revenue through economic development.

Because difficult fiscal challenges still lie ahead.

Long Beach residents benefit from exceptional public safety service.

We have one of the best and most aggressive Fire Departments in California.

Our Firefighters' average salaries, however, fall near the bottom of the 10 cities most comparable in size to Long Beach.

Over the past 25 years, we have seen a ten-fold increase in service calls while our Fire Department staffing levels have remained virtually unchanged.

And 16 of our 23 fire stations are inadequate to meet current and ever increasing service demands. Many were built in the mid-1900's and haven't undergone any rehabilitation since.

While the national crime trends begin to tick upwards after a decade of decline, Long Beach remains a safer city.

Our police officers continue to prove that they are among the best trained and most highly sought after by competing local jurisdictions. Our force continues to be among the most effective in the nation.

Homicides in the City are down 7% this year to our lowest level since 1974. For the first time in 21 years, the East Division had no reported murders.

While we are a safer city today than we were ten years ago, we are not safe enough.

Gangs and drugs still plague many of our neighborhoods and those effects are holding back our entire City.

While our City's homicide rate is down,
There were still 39 lives lost on our streets in 2006 -- and it is too many.

Especially troubling when you consider those deaths were mostly young people, killed before they entered the prime of their lives.

Our City's New Year's Baby, the first born into 2007, will never know his father;
An 18-year old Long Beach young man working two jobs to make ends meet who was killed in an apparent random shooting in Wilmington on Halloween night while he was getting something to eat with his family.

There is an entire generation we will lose as this senseless killing continues.

And to become the great City we all envision, every one of our citizens must have the opportunity to flourish and engage in economic and civic affairs.

It is now time for the city to face this issue squarely and with the priority it demands.

Even if your neighborhood is safe, there are many in the City that are not, and our entire city suffers.

As such, I will ask the Council and City Management to work with me to find the money to fund an additional 100 police office in the FY 2008 budget.

It won't be easy;
The cost may reach \$20 million dollars annually.

But public safety is our first priority and that priority should guide all our budgetary decisions.

We also know that law enforcement is only one side of the coin;
And that true public safety lies in providing hope and opportunity for our young people.

It is the best form of crime prevention.

As a candidate for Mayor, I consistently spoke of the need to create training programs for our city's youth in the construction disciplines that are tied to a real job;

And I am pleased today to announce the implementation of a unique program that has been proven to increase test scores, improve drop-out rates and will lead to the very economic opportunities our City's youth have lacked.

In partnership with the Long Beach Unified School District,
the Teachers Association of Long Beach,
the Los Angeles and Orange County Building and Construction Trades Council
and the Association of General Contractors,
I am pleased to announce that Long Beach Construction Tech will seek to enroll its first students in September of 2007.

LBUSD and TALB will make extraordinary accommodations to place the program at either Jordan or Cabrillo High School;

And I am committed to raising \$500,000 in private start-up funds.

Getting this program off the ground will take heavy lifting and unprecedented cooperation;
But we owe it to our kids to see it through.

I believe training the next generation of City leadership has another component;

And that is increasing the entire community's involvement in our City's Boards and Commissions.

Late last year, I asked a group of citizens led by Barbara Sullivan and Nick Sramek, to engage in a broad review of our boards, commissions and the entire appointments process.

They have sought the input from every commissioner and the City staff for these commissions.

They have spent countless hours conducting hundreds of interviews.

They have considered a myriad of issues ranging from increasing the accessibility of commission meetings to community recruiting efforts that develop a deeper candidate pool and a better understanding of the role of appointees.

In the coming weeks, I will take action on a number of their recommendations to better our City's citizen involvement process.

And I'd like to take this opportunity to ask them to stand and have you join me in publicly thanking them for their service.

So, we begin 2007 with grand ambitions;

Filled with boundless optimism for our City's future despite the challenges that lie ahead.

Later this year, we will say a professional good-bye to someone who has served this City well. A man who charted our course through some very difficult waters and has always served with poise and professionalism. Please join me in thanking City Manager Jerry Miller for his service.

We enter 2007 knowing in our hearts that our advancement as whole City is best assured through the success of every part.

North to Downtown;
Eastside to the West.

Friends, the State of our City is really a reflection of each one of us.

If you look across the country you will find the cities that flourish have done so by concentrating on the basics.

Let our professed commitment to becoming a safer city,

A cleaner city,

And a city that provides real economic prosperity to all citizens become our reality in the coming year.

Baseball again provides wisdom;

Casey Stengel was an extraordinary coach and he preached the basics and fundamentals over and over again.

And for those of you that remember the movie “Bull Durham” it’s really that simple:
you catch the ball,
you throw the ball,
you hit the ball.

In 2007, let’s all keep our eye on the ball.

Thank you.
